

EDITORIAL: Place priority on church planting

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Quickly: Name the most significant issues that will affect Texas Baptists' ability to reach our state with the gospel for the duration of this century.

If church planting isn't on your short list, you need to make a new list.

The cover package of this edition of the *Standard* focuses on church planting. That's because it's absolutely vital to the kingdom of God and, consequently, to the future of our corner of the world.

Editor Marv Knox

Studies consistently show new congregations are much more effective than older churches at engaging people, sharing the gospel and leading them to faith in Jesus. Research reveals young churches may be reaching unbelievers five times faster than settled congregations. In a state like Texas, where the population is booming, that statistic is sobering. And in an organization like the Baptist General Convention of Texas, where the budget has plateaued and begun to decline, it's absolutely significant. Pardon the double negative, but we can't afford not to pour our resources into starting churches.

Unfortunately, a scandal involving church planting left a bad taste in many Texas Baptists' mouths. The BGCT spent more than \$1 million on a program to start hundreds of churches in the Rio Grande Valley with very little to show for the investment of time and money. While this was both tragic and disturbing, we don't have time to wring our hands and lament our losses. If we're even going to attempt to keep pace with population growth, we've got to get busy.

Demographics dictate we primarily must focus on starting more Hispanic churches in order to reach the fastest-growing segment of our state. Thanks to above-average Hispanic birth rates and the pace of immigration, Texas no longer has a majority population of any ethnic group. Before long, Hispanics will comprise more than 50 percent of Texas residents, and that percentage will continue to increase. But we also must keep up with growth on the ever-expanding edges of our metropolitan areas, where we'll need more congregations to reach Anglos, African-Americans and Asian-Americans.

Consequently, we must allocate money to help start these congregations. Some, possibly many, of them may begin in homes, so they won't initially require rent. But they'll still need basic resources and salary for a pastor.

The word "pastor" points to Texas Baptists' single most pressing need—people capable of starting these churches. In order to secure enough pastors, we must cultivate and educate them. We must make an all-out effort to encourage our best and brightest young people to consider the pastorate. We also must encourage many of our most committed and passionate laypeople to consider career changes and enter the ministry. Then we must make ministerial education readily available for all of them. And it must transcend what has been, up to now, traditional ministry training. [As Randel Everett noted](#) on this page a couple of months ago, most of the new churches will need bivocational pastors. Texas Baptists simply don't have the money to start all the churches we need and fund them with full-time pastors.

Our universities and seminaries will need to supply students with the skills to succeed in their "day jobs" and also thrive at planting and growing young congregations. This will require a two-pronged educational process. Of course, not all these ministers will be able to attend classes on a university or seminary campus. We'll need to make their training available in churches across the state and through the Internet. And we must pair

them with mentors who can provide practical guidance and, even more importantly, encouragement.

A few weeks ago, we talked about the need for the BGCT to set budgeting priorities. This is where we must start.

Marv Knox is editor of the Baptist Standard. Visit his [FaithWorks Blog](#).